

PREFACE

I have always been drawn to the mountains and moorlands above all other types of country. Their birds gain in charm and fascination from the wild and beautiful places in which they live, and seeking them here has a special appeal. When I began, there were few books on the hill birds – mainly accounts by bird photographers of their quest for workable nests and experiences from the hide. I devoured these eagerly and was fired with enthusiasm by their vividness. The regional and county avifaunas were another source of information, though mainly scattered under different species. And there were personal contacts with local ornithologists who had their own extensive and first-hand knowledge of the mountain and moorland birds, as the best source of help and inspiration.

Nowadays there is a wealth of literature and information. Many of the notable species are the subject of whole monographs or long and detailed papers in the scientific journals. Some birds have received enormous attention by many different people, and a great deal is known about them. Almost every year the list of birds hitherto little known grows shorter. There have been numerous general works on the uplands, their ecology and natural history, as well as the birdlife in particular, and these fill in the context. Some species are, nevertheless, still rather little studied and knowledge about them is somewhat general.

This is not a guidebook on where to see upland birds: there are plenty of those already. My background is as an ecologist, and this is the main emphasis I have given to the subject of this book. I have tried to select some of the more interesting and significant aspects of the lives of our mountain and moorland birds, and the ways in which they relate to their environment, including each other. The approach is based on a subdivision of uplands into several main types, with an account of the distinctive though overlapping bird assemblages of these. In the field I have paid attention to several species in particular – Peregrine, Raven, Golden Eagle, Golden Plover and Dotterel – and have written here about some aspects of these from personal knowledge, though drawing on other relevant studies besides. For the rest, my field knowledge varies from casual and patchy to

non-existent, and here my treatment has had to be guided by the work and writings of others. I have given most space to those species which may truly be regarded as hill birds, compared with a briefer treatment of others with more debatable claims to this designation.

The authors of this series were told to be sparing with references. This requires advance explanation and apology, in that some major sources for particular species are referenced only once, though clearly some are rather freely drawn upon thereafter. Some significant papers which would merit reference in a more technical work are not mentioned at all, and many points of detail are not acknowledged. Some of the more general major sources, such as *Birds of the Western Palaearctic* (Cramp and Simmons, 1977-88), *Birds of the British Isles* (Bannerman, 1953-63), *Atlas of European Birds* (Voous, 1960), *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Sharrock, 1976), *The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland* (Lack, 1986) and *Birds in Scotland* (Thom, 1986), should be assumed to be a frequent source of factual material. Where a name is given without a date, this refers to a personal communication.

I am greatly in the debt of the many ornithologists and others whose information, ideas and encouragement have helped me so much, and those whose companionship in the field has been an added pleasure. The late Ernest Blezard, naturalist extraordinary, whose fund of knowledge was always a source of wonder, inspired and fostered my early interest. Desmond Nethersole-Thompson has given freely from his vast and unique experience of the mountain birds, to my great benefit. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Nature Conservancy Council for much information and discussion of conservation issues, particularly Des Thompson, John Mitchell, Peter Walters Davies, Peter Davis, Dick Balharry, Derek Langslow, Alison Rush, James Marsden, Mark Felton, Tim Reed, Mike Pienkowski, David Stroud and Jeff Watson. I have also had rewarding discussions of upland birds with Jim Lockie, Ian Newton, Mick Marquiss and Adam Watson. In the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Ian Prestt, Art Lance, Roger Lovegrove, Graham Williams, Iolo Williams and Roy Dennis have been extremely helpful in various ways.

My gratitude to numerous providers of Peregrine data has been expressed previously: there is space here for only a collective tribute to most of them, but for much help with other species as well, I thank Geoff Horne, Jim Birkett, Doug Weir, Dick Roxburgh, George Carse, Richard Mearns, Peter Dare, Geoffrey Fryer and Paul Stott. Colin Harrison, Peter Hudson, John Callion and John Strowger have contributed particular information, and I am grateful to the late Bill Robinson, the late Walter Thompson, Stuart Illis, Grant and Jean Roger, and Chris Durell for their help and company in the field. Des Thompson, Donald Watson and John Birks have each read sections of the book, and given valuable advice and

suggestions for improvement. The work has also had the benefit of comments from Chris Perrins, as editorial consultant to the series. My wife, Jeannette, has typed the manuscript and given me every encouragement in the writing of it.

I thank the many private landowners and the Forestry Commission for access to the uplands in their ownership. In the concluding chapter on conservation of upland birds, the views expressed are entirely my own, in a private capacity, and are not to be taken as representing those of the Nature Conservancy Council. The politics of conservation are fluid, so that some situations may change appreciably and present commentary upon them soon become out-dated. Such commentary nevertheless seems worth while, as an opportunity for contributing to the public debate which may cause the direction of change to be beneficial.

Chris Rose has most ably met my wishes for illustrations with his wonderful series of drawings and cover painting. I am grateful to Dennis Green, Robert Smith, Edmund Fellowes, Robin Fisher and Eric Hosking for supplying bird photographs. The habitat photographs are my own. For their permission to reproduce maps and figures, I thank the British Trust for Ornithology and Tim Sharrock (breeding distribution in Britain and Ireland), Karel Voous (World breeding distribution) and Peter Hudson (population changes in Red Grouse).